



Liberia

International Religious Freedom Report 2008

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

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The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report.

There were some reports of societal abuses based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 43,000 square miles and a population of 3.5 million. It is estimated that as much as 40 percent of the population practices either Christianity or Christianity combined with elements of traditional indigenous religious beliefs. Approximately 40 percent exclusively practices traditional indigenous religious beliefs. An estimated 20 percent of the population practices Islam. A small percentage is Baha'i, Hindu, Sikh, or Buddhist.

Christian groups include Lutheran, Baptist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, United Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal (AME) and AME Zion denominations, and a variety of Pentecostal churches. Some of the Pentecostal movements are affiliated with churches outside the country, while others are independent.

Christians live throughout the country. Muslims belong mainly to the Mandingo and Vai ethnic groups. Mandingo reside throughout the country, while Vai live predominantly in the west. Ethnic groups in all regions participate in the traditional religious practices of the Poro and Sande secret societies.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Government ceremonies open and close with prayers and may include the singing of hymns. The prayers and hymns are usually Christian but occasionally are Islamic. A majority of government officials are Christian; however, there is one Muslim cabinet minister, one Muslim Supreme Court judge, a few Muslim assistant ministers, and seven Muslim members of the legislature.

The Government observes Easter and Christmas as national holidays. The Government mandates that public businesses and markets, including Muslim businesses and shops, remain closed on Sundays and major

Christian holy days, an issue that Muslim leaders in the past brought to the Legislative Assembly and the Supreme Court to no avail. There is no legal requirement to excuse Muslims from employment or classes for Friday prayers, although some employers do so.

All organizations, including religious groups, must register their articles of incorporation with the Government, along with a statement of the purpose of the organization. Registration is routine, and there were no reports that the registration process was burdensome or discriminatory. The Government does not require traditional indigenous religious groups to register, and they generally do not do so.

Public schools offer religious education, particularly Christian education, but do not require it. The Government subsidizes private schools, most of which are affiliated with either Christian or Muslim organizations. Some Muslims claimed that the budget continues to underfund Islamic schools.

High-level government officials were required to take oaths when assuming their new offices. Christians kissed the Bible and Muslims the Qur'an on those occasions.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report.

Some Muslim leaders felt that certain Islamic holy days should be national holidays, since Christian holy days were celebrated. In January 2008 the Minister of Information called for Ramadan to be recognized as a national holiday for religious equity reasons. However, some elements of the Government disapproved of the measure and the President stated that there would be no change in policy.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were some abuses based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Despite frequent interaction among religious groups, some tension remained. The Inter-Religious Council promoted dialogue among various religious communities.

There were reports of ritual killings -- the killing for body parts for use in traditional rituals -- from all parts of the country. Many believe that practitioners of traditional indigenous religious beliefs among the Grebo and Krahn, who are concentrated in the southeast, engage in ritual killings. The Government treated ritualistic killing cases as homicides and investigated and prosecuted them accordingly. There were multiple reports of protests against ritual killings and calling for government investigations into particular cases, which at times led to riots and loss of life.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Ambassador and other embassy officers participated in religious ceremonies and spoke at interfaith meetings to show support for religious freedom and interfaith dialogue.

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